

February 23, 2009

Colleagues,

We are pleased to note that the editorial staff of the *Oshkosh Northwestern* is interested in the relationship between sustainability and the state budget. Consequently, we would like to take this opportunity to respond to the *Northwestern's* invitation in their [editorial](#) of February 20, 2009 to provide a more detailed rationale for the very high priority our campus community has given to the University's nationally distinctive sustainability initiatives.

As state funding of public higher education continues to decline, we, as a campus community, continue to identify cost-saving solutions, including alternative energy resources and the opportunity to educate current and future generations of students in taking an active role in such measures.

Simply put, the hiring of the institution's first director of sustainability was a thoughtful and pragmatic strategy for enhancing the current and future infrastructure of a sustainable campus, while engaging students in environmental solutions.

The creation of a sustainability director position and the hiring of the first director are not the first steps UW Oshkosh has undertaken in its efforts to become more sustainable.

In 2002-03, UW Oshkosh was the first university to participate in the Wisconsin Energy Initiative. We also completed a student-led environmental sustainability and facilities operations audit.

In 2003, UW Oshkosh became the first Wisconsin university to join the Environmental Protection Agency's Green Power Partnership by agreeing to purchase at least 3 percent of its energy from renewable sources, making it at the time the largest purchaser of green energy in Wisconsin. As a result, the University received an EPA Green Power Purchase Award (the EPA's highest leadership award) and was listed by the EPA as an Energy Star Case Study. In 2004, UW Oshkosh received a National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology Recognition Award for its campus environmental audit and, in 2005, the University received a second Energy Star Award from the EPA.

In 2008, the University adopted a policy to purchase cage-free eggs and unveiled its Campus Sustainability Plan, which guides its efforts to continue as a national leader in responsible environmental stewardship, education, outreach and research. The campus also became the nation's first Fair Trade University and completed one of the most comprehensive carbon footprint studies in the nation.

Additionally, UW Oshkosh is one of only 41 universities in the nation listed on the U.S. Department of Energy's Web site as one of the largest purchasers of renewable energy.

The University has long been a leader in the campus sustainability movement, but to take our efforts to the next level, we identified a need to bring on board an experienced and creative

leader who will work closely with campus stakeholders, faculty and students to ensure that environmental stewardship is integrated, aligned with, and supportive of UW Oshkosh teaching, research and service goals.

In addition, the sustainability director will work to accomplish a variety of operational goals ([campus sustainability plan](#) and [plan update](#)) that have and will result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual cost avoidance and savings. Examples of current cost avoidance and savings include:

- Reused light poles, resulting in increased energy efficiency and less light pollution at a savings of \$300,000.
- Reduced water consumption by 24.5 million gallons/year, an annual savings of \$130,986, beginning in 2000.
- Reduced energy consumption by 563,017 kilowatt-hours, an annual savings of \$27,600, beginning in 2003.

Some examples of future “stretch” goals that, when accomplished, will result in even larger annual cost avoidance and savings include:

- Reducing the annual consumption of fossil fuels for heating by 50 percent from 2000 levels by 2012.
- Reducing overall water consumption levels by 50 percent from 2000 levels by 2012.
- Increasing biodiversity and usable green space on campus while reducing dependence on fossil fuels, other extracted materials, chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

We believe these “stretch” goals are achievable as demonstrated by recent successes including:

- An annual reduction of electrical consumption by 5 percent over a three-year period.
- A 24-percent decrease in coal consumption over a four-year period.
- A 21-percent decrease in natural gas consumption over a three-year period.
- A 35-percent decrease in water consumption between 2000 and 2006.

As UW Oshkosh’s new campus sustainability director, Dr. Almut Beringer will work directly with the university’s senior leadership in both academic and administrative areas, as well as the Campus Sustainability Council, other governance groups and external constituencies. She will write and submit requests for funding from the fast-growing state and federal sustainable grants programs that are in part funded by the federal economic recovery stimulus package.

By addressing the operational and academic side of sustainability in higher education (i.e. sustainability research and education), UW Oshkosh is one of as yet very few universities worldwide comprehensively addressing sustainability beyond energy efficiency, water conservation, recycling, etc., through research, teaching and collaborative learning, in order that students and the campus community might play a leadership role in enhancing the quality of life in their own communities.

Dr. Beringer brings to the University a wealth of knowledge and experience in sustainability in higher education. With more than two decades of related experience, she will provide leadership in the University’s sustainability efforts, including developing strategies that will ultimately provide substantial savings on energy costs. She also will teach courses in her area of expertise and spearhead efforts to:

- infuse sustainability across the curriculum;
- create a culture of awareness for environmental responsibility;

- generate critical thinking, conversation and sophisticated debate about sustainability.

UW Oshkosh will do all we can to create additional efficiencies. We must remind all internal and external stakeholders, however, that Wisconsin universities are already ranked among the “five most productive state systems ... of higher education relative to their resources” (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems). The UW System and its universities already have the lowest administrative cost in the nation and only one UW System comprehensive university has a lower percentage of administrative staff than UW Oshkosh.

Furthermore, while the Higher Learning Commission accreditation evaluation team lauded UW Oshkosh, they raised a serious concern regarding our all-too-thin administrative support – something unheard of in such reports. Nonetheless, we will only add administrative leadership where we are convinced that it will improve the quality of our students’ education and help us find more support for our faculty and staff. We hope you join us in welcoming Dr. Beringer to Oshkosh and the great state of Wisconsin.

We encourage your readers to visit UW Oshkosh’s sustainability Web site <http://www.uwosh.edu/sustainability> as well as <http://www.uwosh.edu/engage> for a more thorough summary of our commitment to strategic and tangible sustainable solutions.

We want to thank the *Northwestern* for this opportunity to detail our rationale for UW Oshkosh’s highest priority strategic actions and budgetary commitments, such as sustainability initiatives, tenure-track faculty searches to serve increased enrollment and enhanced campus safety – to best serve the residents of Wisconsin during these challenging economic times.

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